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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002816

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/RPM (SHINAGEL)
ALSO FOR NEA/RA AND NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: UAE REQUESTS PARTICIPATION IN NATO'S ICI

REF: ABU DHABI 1376

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) The UAEG on June 14 formally notified the NATO SecGen of its interest in participating in NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). NATO's approval of the request would mean the UAE would join Gulf neighbors Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar as ICI partners. Assuming NATO brings the UAE into the ICI fold, NATO military headquarters would send a team to the UAE in the fall to explain its program of cooperative activities, and ask the UAE to choose which ones it would like to pursue. The NATO SecGen would follow up with a visit to the UAE, according to the German Embassy, the Contact Point Embassy on ICI in the UAE. UAE officials have told us that they were receptive to the ICI's focus on training (reftel).

¶2. (C) The UAEG used the occasion of a June 18-20 security fact-finding mission by the Political Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (Subcommittee on NATO Partnerships) to inform the diplomatic community of its request to participate in ICI. (Note: The NATO delegation, consisting of 25 members from nine NATO member states and three associated states, was not in the UAE on ICI business; it was here to learn more about the security situation in the Gulf.)

¶3. (C) During the NATO delegation's visit, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), State Security Director Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed, Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Interior Minister Sheikh Saif bin Zayed, and other UAEG officials provided briefings on UAE and regional security concerns, including an assessment of the UAE's efforts to combat terrorism and its experience as an international peacekeeper. The following summary is based on a June 19 meeting between the delegation and NATO Ambassadors, a June 21 briefing by the German Ambassador, and conversations with the individual parliamentarians and UAEG briefers.

-- Saudi Arabia: MbZ expressed concern about the potential repercussions in the Gulf should the Saudi regime collapse. If Saudi Arabia were to "implode," what would come after would be worse, including the potential for a radical Islamic ideology being exported to neighboring states, such as the UAE. Saudi Arabia was important to the region and to the Muslim world, and it was important for the international community to help maintain its stability. It was important to dialogue with the Saudi leadership and not to destabilize them by publicly pressuring them to reform, he added. MbZ blamed the Saudi educational system for indoctrinating the mainstream population with extremist ideas, and he was critical of the Saudi government for failing to oversee charities.

-- Iran: MbZ noted that Iran appears to want to relive its glorious past as a "Persian superpower." He said he believes the Iranians have a "hidden, long-range agenda" and a different way of thinking than their Gulf neighbors. MbZ said the UAE does not believe Iran's argument for developing a nuclear program for peaceful purposes. Iran has abundant oil and gas resources, and it is flaring gas, he said. He said the EU-3 initiative was "very good," but added that he was skeptical that the EU could persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program. He expressed concern that no one was telling Iran what the "red lines" were.

-- Afghanistan: MbZ noted that the deployment of UAE Special Forces to Afghanistan represented the first such deployment by an Arab country in Operation Enduring Freedom. He justified sending troops to Afghanistan as part of a mission to defend the UAE against extremism.

-- Iraq: MbZ said that it was time people call the Iraq war what it really is, "a civil war." He also expressed concern about what would become of the "young mujahideen" after peace and stability return to Iraq. He recalled how the Afghanistan mujahideen dispersed around the world and continue to pose a threat. MbZ also said that the UAE was convinced Iran was interfering in Iraq's internal affairs, including financial support and political influence on the Iraqi Transitional Government.

-- Counterterrorism: MbZ underscored the role of education in combating terrorism, saying investment in education is a top priority in the UAE. He said that extremists, whom he referred to generically as the "Muslim Brotherhood," had penetrated the educational system in the UAE and other Gulf countries. MbZ said the UAEG rejected rigid Islamic education, advocating more freedom for the young generation instead. Reform would be achieved by "privatizing" the entire educational system in the coming years, with the UAEG paying for the private education of its nationals.

-- Hezbollah: Both MbZ and his brother Sheikh Abdullah expressed concerns about Hezbollah's threat to the region. They said they regard Hezbollah as a potentially greater threat than Al Qaida. The UAE is "very focused" on Hezbollah. MbZ stated that Hezbollah was supported by three countries, but did not name them. He also referred to ties between Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. MbZ and Abdullah also said that HAMAS had become more radical, and they had noticed "radical tendencies" in Fatah.

-- Peacekeeping role: The UAE briefed on its past and present peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Somalia, and its demining operation in Lebanon. The Emiratis' message was, "If there is a conflict somewhere in the world and you need us, we will be there."

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